

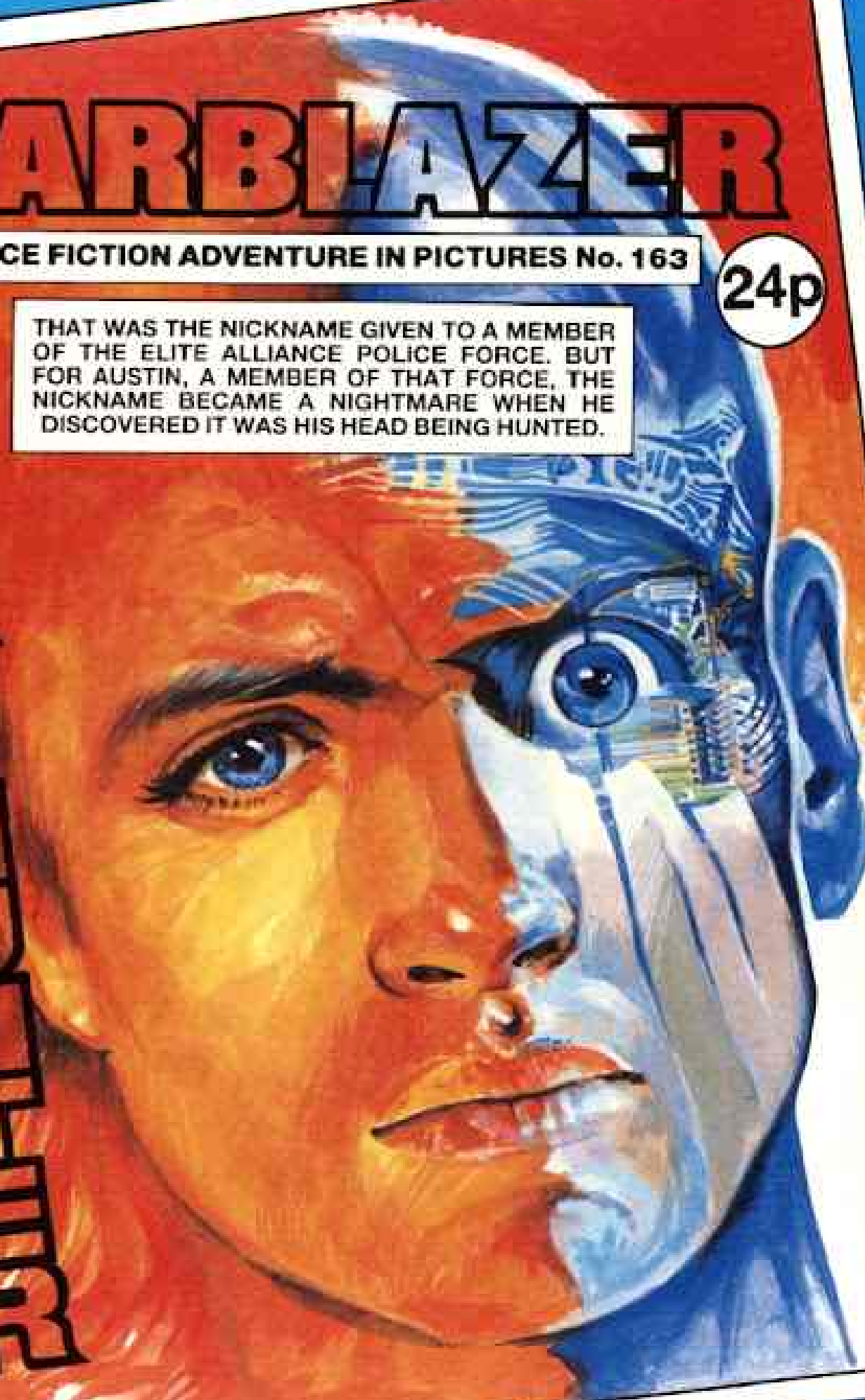
# STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 163

24p

THAT WAS THE NICKNAME GIVEN TO A MEMBER OF THE ELITE ALLIANCE POLICE FORCE. BUT FOR AUSTIN, A MEMBER OF THAT FORCE, THE NICKNAME BECAME A NIGHTMARE WHEN HE DISCOVERED IT WAS HIS HEAD BEING HUNTED.

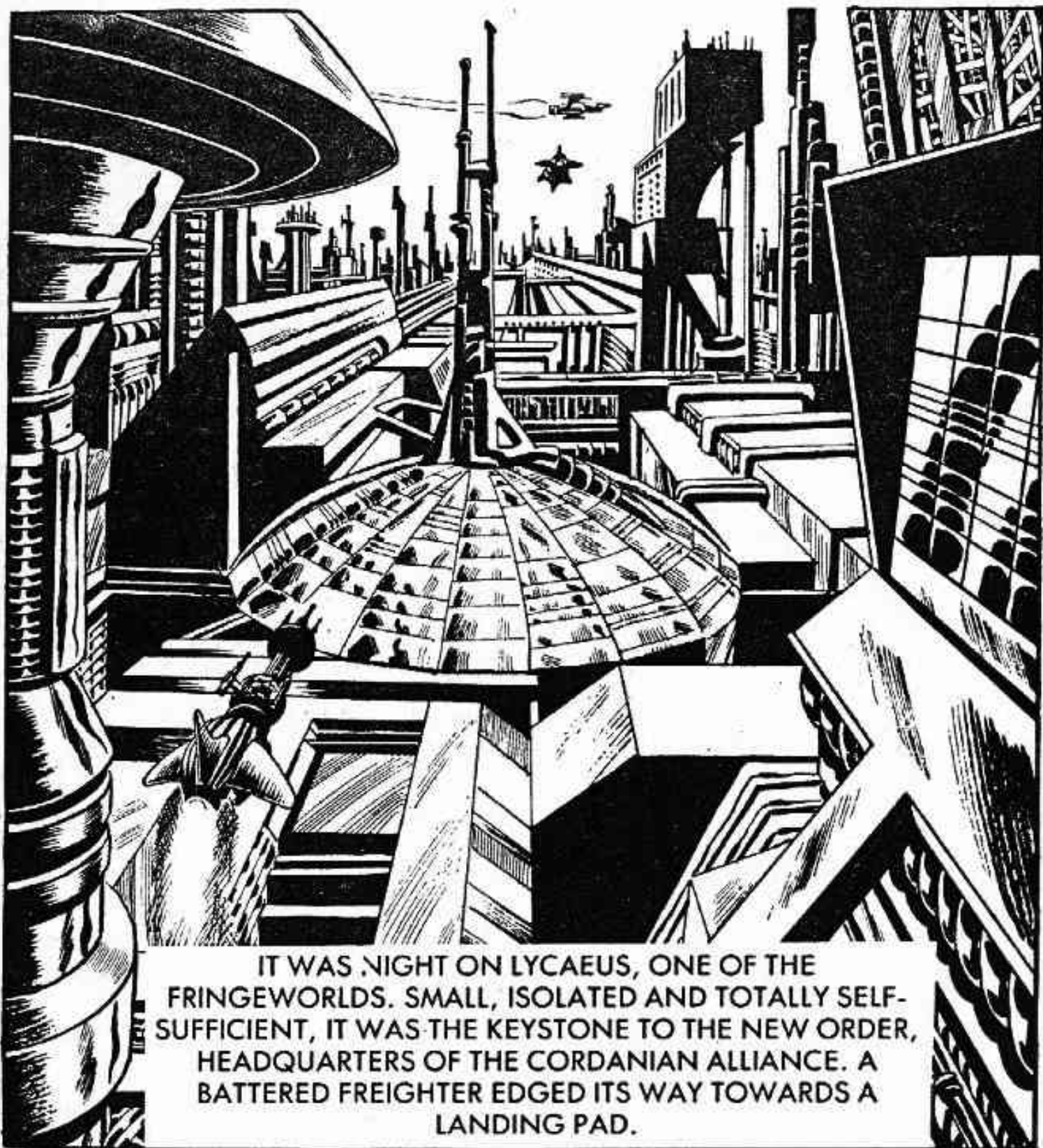
HEADHUNTER



# STARBLAZER

By 2290 all the races of The Galaxy had agreed to try and live in peace. The Cordanian Alliance was set up to monitor law and order in the huge galactic conurbation. One hundred agents, called Moderators, but better known as Headhunters, patrolled the galactic deeps. But one by one they were disappearing, and the only link, a tenuous one, was an artificial world where the Headhunters were trained.

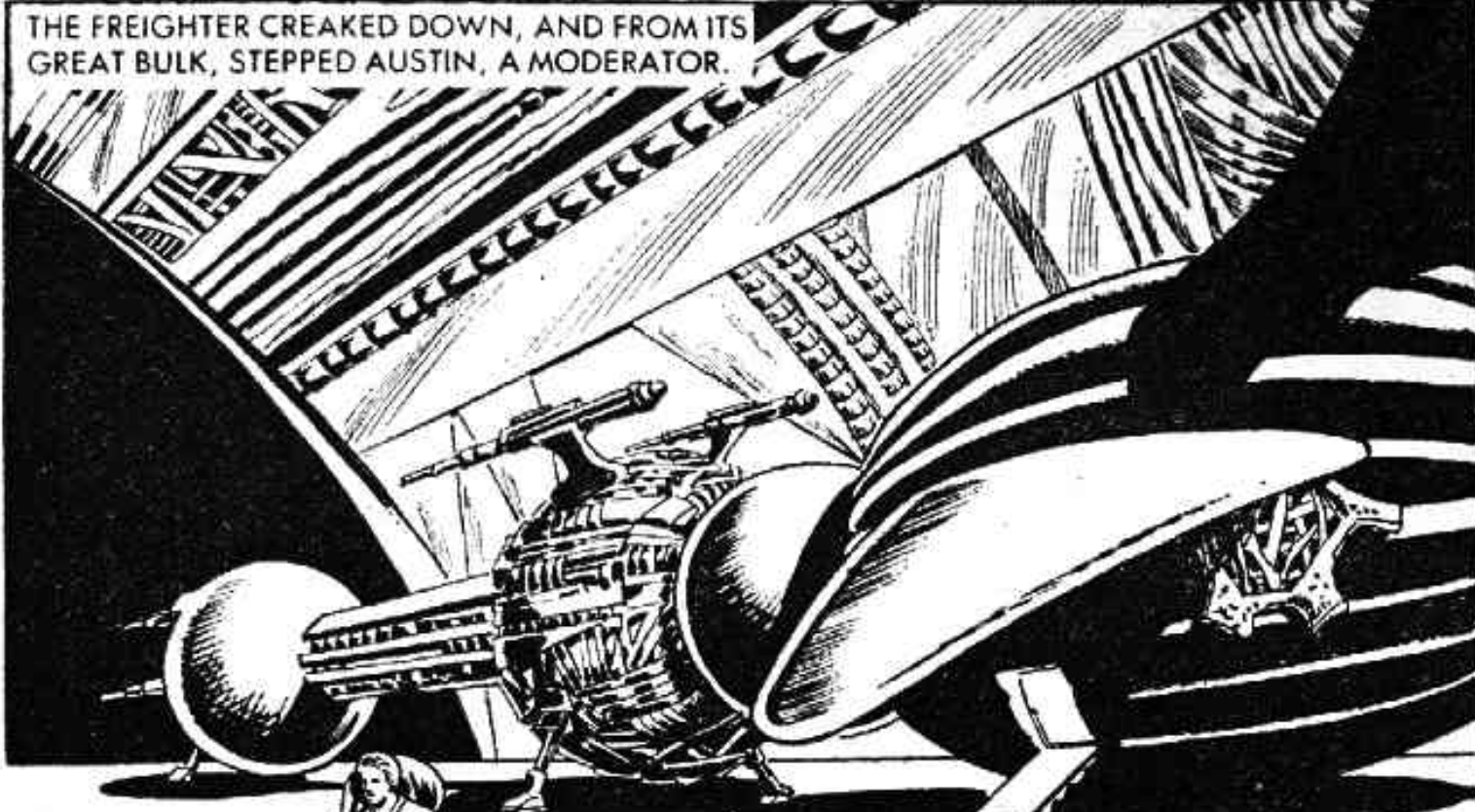
# HEAD HUNTER



IT WAS NIGHT ON LYCAEUS, ONE OF THE FRINGEWORLDS. SMALL, ISOLATED AND TOTALLY SELF-SUFFICIENT, IT WAS THE KEYSTONE TO THE NEW ORDER, HEADQUARTERS OF THE CORDANIAN ALLIANCE. A BATTERED FREIGHTER EDGED ITS WAY TOWARDS A LANDING PAD.




4  
THE FREIGHTER CREAKED DOWN, AND FROM ITS  
GREAT BULK, STEPPED AUSTIN, A MODERATOR.



I WONDER WHAT BOSS  
NEBRIN WANTS WITH ME . . .

AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE CORDANIAN ALLIANCE,  
LEGISLATOR NEBRIN WASTED NO TIME.



A DOZEN MODERATORS HAVE  
DISAPPEARED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS.  
WHY, WE DON'T KNOW? BUT EACH OF  
THEM WAS DUE FOR HIS ANNUAL  
ASSESSMENT . . .

BY THE LEDEZEMA GAME!




4.7 UNITS LATER, AUSTIN MINGLED WITH THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS ON THE ARTIFICIAL PLANET, ICON, HOME OF THE LEDEZEMA GAME.





AS THE PARTICIPANTS PREPARED, KALYAN EXPLAINED—



BELOW US, IS THE TESTING GROUND. THE PURPOSE OF WHICH IS TO OVERCOME VARIOUS OBSTACLES UNDER SIMULATED BATTLE CONDITIONS AND RETURN TO SAFETY. IF ONE OF THE DROIDS DOWN THERE REGISTERS A HIT, YOU WILL FEEL SOME PAIN, OF COURSE, BUT NOTHING MORE. AS FAR AS THE GAME GOES, YOU'RE DEAD AND WILL RETURN IMMEDIATELY TO THIS LEVEL.

YOUR ADVERSARIES WILL BE DROIDS MODERATED ENTIRELY ON THIS PLANET. YOUR TASK IS TO KILL THEM BEFORE THEY KILL YOU. THE IDENTBLOCS WELDED ONTO YOUR HANDS INCORPORATE YOUR PERSONAL TRANSFER-CODE. YOU WILL BE BEAMED DOWN IN TEN SEKS BY MEANS OF THEM, AND FOR YOUR SAFETY, MUST NOT ATTEMPT TO REMOVE THEM. REMEMBER, YOU GAIN 10 POINTS FOR EVERY KILL YOU MAKE. TODAY'S PASS IS 40.

INSTANTS LATER, THEY WERE ALL  
BEAMED DOWN TO THE TEST GROUND  
CALLED ACHERON. IT WAS HOT AND  
STICKY WITH AN EERIE SILENCE. AUSTIN  
FOUND HIMSELF ALONE IN  
SWAMPLANDS.

I'M THE ONLY MODERATOR HERE — THE OTHERS  
ARE BUSINESSMEN OUT FOR KICKS.





THE TREES WERE HUNG WITH MOSS AND LIANAS AND RAW, WINE-THROATED ORCHIDS. SOMEWHERE, FAR AWAY, A MAN SCREAMED — VICTIM NUMBER ONE.

IF SOMETHING SINISTER IS GOING ON THEN I'LL BE THE ONE THAT'S SINGLED OUT FOR ATTENTION.

KILL SCORE +10 — AUSTIN.


I FELT THE HEAT FROM THAT SHOT . . . AND I THINK IT WOULD HAVE CAUSED A BIT MORE THAN PAIN.

AUSTIN ALMOST DIDN'T SEE THE SNIPER BUT HIS IN-BUILT SIXTH SENSE, FEAR, SHARPENED HIS REFLEXES. A SPLIT SECOND BEFORE THE SNIPER FIRED, AUSTIN HEARD THE LASER CHARGER.



9

AUSTIN WADED ACROSS THE ROT-SCENTED SWAMP, IN AN ATTEMPT TO REMOVE THE REPLICANT'S PROGRAMME MODULE—

A black and white comic panel showing a man, Austin, wading through a swamp. He is wearing a headband with a circular emblem, a tactical vest, and holding a rifle. He is looking forward with a determined expression. The swamp is dark and murky with some foliage visible in the background.

IF I CAN REMOVE THAT BEFORE IT DERESOLUTIONISES. MAYBE I CAN FIND OUT EXACTLY WHAT THAT DROID WAS INTENDED TO DO TO ME.



DE-REZZING WAS SLANG FOR DERESOLUTIONISING. THE PROCESS BY WHICH BODIES WERE BEAM TRANSPORTED.

IN THE CONTROL CENTRE PRECEPTOR  
SHELDON WATCHED THE MONITOR—



SO AUSTIN HAS  
STRUCK FIRST!

## NEXUS MODELS

HE'S GOOD! BUT WE'LL SEE WHAT  
HE DOES NOW. INITIATING  
SEQUENCE FOR TOP CLASS  
DROIDS.

THE NEXUS MODEL DROIDS WERE THE MOST  
SOPHISTICATED DEVELOPED . . . AND THEY WERE HUNTER-KILLER.



AUSTIN WAS JUST LEAVING THE SWAMP AREA WHEN HE SENSED THEM.

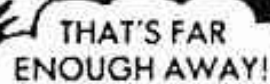
FIVE, MAYBE SIX, AROUND 200 METRES  
AWAY!

AUSTIN HID BEHIND THE WALL OF RUSHES AND WAITED. THE RUSHES WERE OLD, DRY AND  
SMELLED OF CINNAMON.



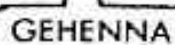






THAT'S FAR  
ENOUGH AWAY!

THE GRENADE BOUNCED TO A HALT AT THE LEADER'S FEET—



GEHENNA...




**KILL SCORE: +60 — AUSTIN.**

AUSTIN TREKKED ON. THE HEAT WAS BAD. THE HEAT AND THE INSECTS —

FOR A MOCK COMBAT ZONE,  
EVERYTHING IS MIGHTY REAL . . .  
INCLUDING THESE INSECTS.




WHEN AUSTIN REACHED THE FIRST MARKER POST IN A NEUTRAL ZONE, HE USED HIS MODERATOR'S CARD TO OBTAIN INFORMATION—



INFORMATION TAPPING ISN'T IN THE RULES OF THIS TEST, BUT NEITHER IS THIS! ANOTHER PLATOON . . . FIVE GROUND TROOPS, HEAVILY ARMED. AND ONE OF THEM'S A COMMUNICATION'S CARRIER. THAT'S NOT IN THE RULE BOOK. NO COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PLATOONS AND MONITORS.

AUSTIN BEGAN PLANTING GENERATOR DISCS FOR A FORCE NET. IF JUST ONE OF THE SOLDIERS ENTERED THE SENSOR PATH, THEY'D THROW UP A HIGH-ENERGY GRID WITH ENOUGH POWER TO CARBONISE THEM.



SO IT LOOKS AS IF THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE AGENTS GO MISSING. BUT WHY JUST KILL THEM?

A FEW SHORT UNITS LATER—





KARLTON — YOU KEEP ON THE PERIMETER DEFENCE. IF HE'S GOT ANYTHING PLANNED, THIS IS WHERE HE'LL HIT—

KARLTON?? MODERATOR, CLASS OF '97 . . . THE YEAR ABOVE ME?

THE FORCE NET DID ITS JOB—

THE LASER DISC!  
GET THE LASER DISC!

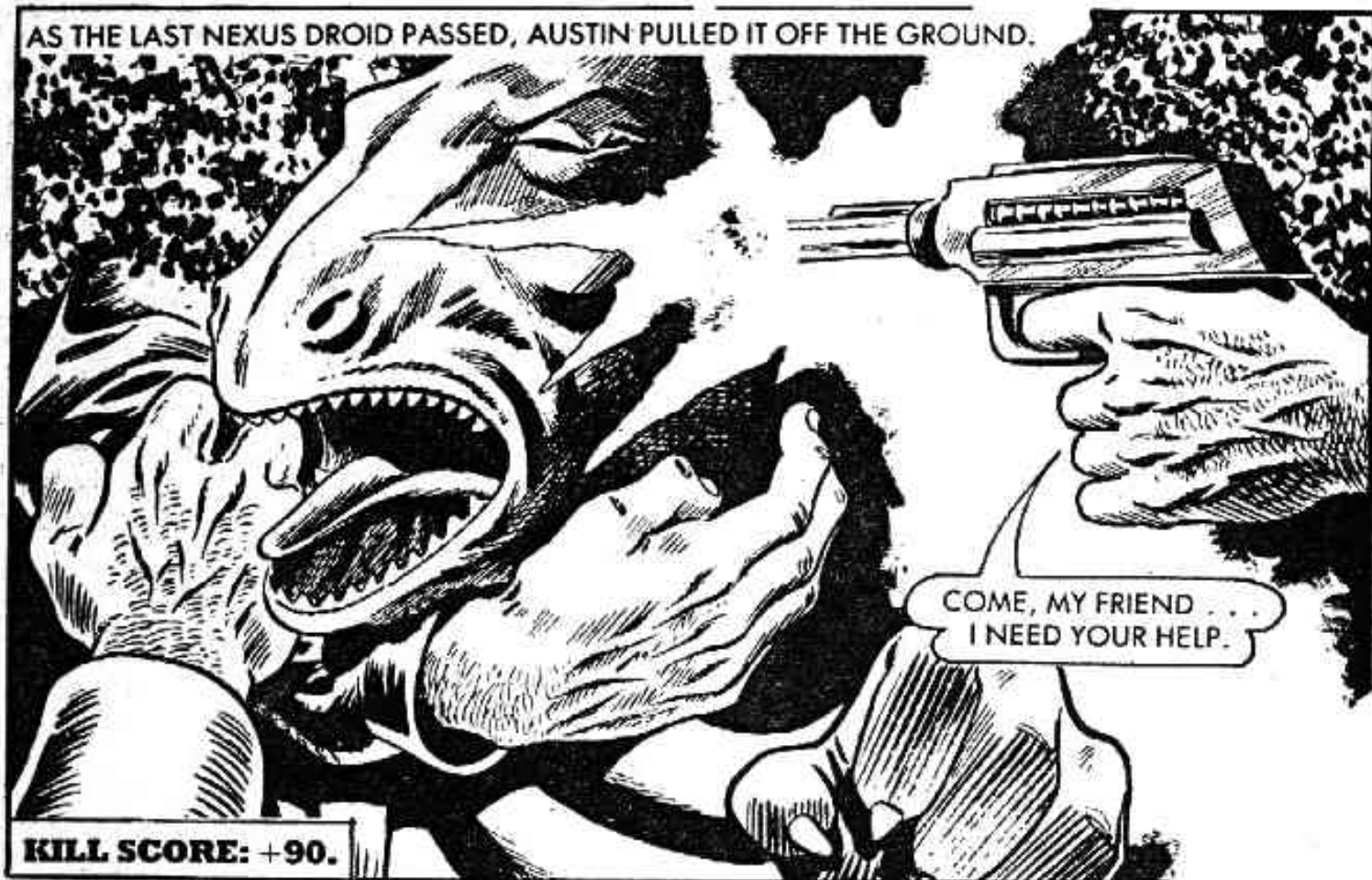
KILL SCORE: +20. RUNNING TOTAL +80.








AS THE LAST NEXUS DROID PASSED, AUSTIN PULLED IT OFF THE GROUND.




**KILL SCORE: +90.**

AUSTIN DESPERATELY SEARCHED FOR THE MICROSHEET PROGRAMME BEFORE THE NEXUS DEREZZED.



IT WOULD APPEAR THEY ARE OUT TO  
GET SOMEBODY . . .



. . . AND THAT SOMEBODY IS ME! IF YOU  
CAN'T WIN BY THE RULES . . . CHEAT!



STASIS POINT 45-9  
VECTOR GROUND PATH  
009/004/1  
DISTANCE: 563.

EXACTLY WHAT  
I WANTED.

AUSTIN SLOTTED THE MICROSHEETS  
INTO HIS COMPUTER. CO-ORDINATES  
FOR GROUND BASES, ARMAMENT  
HOLDS AND STASIS SHELTERS  
FLICKERED ON THE SCREEN.

AUSTIN'S EVERY MOVE WAS  
BEING MONITORED.

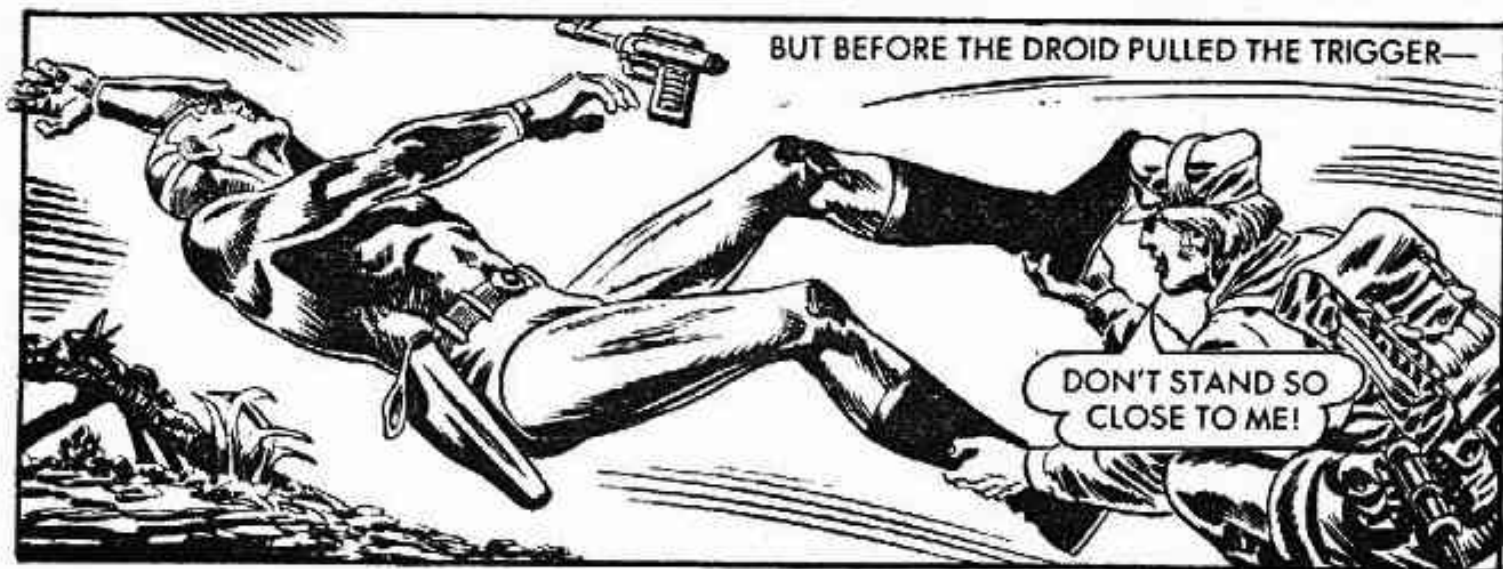


HE IS SMART! I THINK  
WE MIGHT CHANGE THE RULES.

AUSTIN, SUSPICIOUS AND EVER MORE  
CAREFUL, BEGAN TO REALISE WHAT WAS  
HAPPENING.

IF THESE ARE THE MISSING MODERATORS,  
SOMEHOW, SOMEBODY MUST CONTROL  
THEM . . . WHY?

THE CHANGE OF RULES LOOKED LIKE ENDING THE GAME FOR AUSTIN, AS ANOTHER DROID WAS BEAMED IN—





THE DROID WAS GOOD. IT WAS FAST, AND HAD UNBELIEVABLE REFLEXES.



ALMOST IN ONE MOVEMENT, THE DROID PRODUCED A BLASTER AND AIMED—



HOW COULD ANYTHING  
BE SO FAST?

BUT AUSTIN WAS QUICK AS WELL—

SHEEESH!

USING HIS ARMS AS LEVERS, AUSTIN LASHED OUT AT THE DROID.





AUSTIN DIDN'T WAIT TO ASK QUESTIONS.

EAT LASKNIFE!



AUSTIN EXAMINED THE DROID, AND BECAME EVEN MORE BEWILDERED.

ODD! NO PROGRAMMES  
ON THAT ONE . . .



KILL SCORE: +100.

AUSTIN CHECKED HIS AMMOPAK. THERE WERE TWO GENERATOR CELLS LEFT WHICH HE PUT IN THE RIFLE, WONDERING IF THEY'D BE ENOUGH.



HE WAS STILL WONDERING WHEN THE TOXIN SHELLS STRUCK—

WHAT THE . . . ?



AFTER HE'D PUT HIS RESPIRATOR MASK ON, HE GOT UNDERCOVER, QUICK. THEN HE USED THE TRACER TO TRY AND LOCATE THE ATTACK.



USING AN IMAGE INTENSIFIER HE TRACKED THE ATTACKER—



GOT IT! A  
SKYFIGHTER!



00 45-11 / 3  
INCOMING BARYON DISCHARGE

BUT BEFORE HE COULD MOVE —



AAAARGH! THAT'S MORE THAN PAIN  
— THAT'S BLOOD. THAT CONFIRMS IT  
— THESE MONKEYS ARE TRYING TO  
KILL ME.

HE SAW A REST POINT THROUGH THE  
UNDERGROWTH, BUT THAT DIDN'T MATTER  
NOW. THE GLIDER SKYFIGHTER WAS ALL THAT  
MATTERED . . . HE HAD TO GET THE  
SKYFIGHTER . . .





PAIN SPREAD THROUGH HIS BODY. EVERYTHING SEEMED STRANGE, BRIGHT . . . HE TRIED TO CONCENTRATE . . . HE FITTED A DOLBY-13 INCENDIARY CHARGE TO THE RIFLE . . . AND SET THE SIGHTS . . .

... AND WAITED.

STEADY . . . DEEP BREATHS . . .

THERE WAS A SOUND OF THUNDER AS THE SKYFIGHTER DRIFTED ON TO THE DOT OF THE LASER SIGHTER—

—AND IT FIRED AUTOMATICALLY.

THE SKYFIGHTER DISINTEGRATED—





THE SHELTER WAS SO NEAR, YET HE COULD HARDLY MOVE HIS FINGERS WITH THE PAIN—

GOT TO GET IN!

BUT FINALLY HE MADE IT—

I...





THEN AUSTIN FELT NOTHING.



WHEN HE CAME ROUND, HE WAS IN A MED-UNIT.



HE DIDN'T HURT AT ALL — EVEN  
HIS SHOULDER WAS PAINLESS.



HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN HERE? AND  
WHO HAS BEEN TREATING ME?

AUSTIN WASTED NO TIME IN  
DRESSING—

NO WEAPONS!

IT'S TIME TO HAVE A LOOK ROUND.



THE CORRIDORS WERE LONG AND WHITE AND AIR-CONDITIONED. THEY WERE ALSO  
TOTALLY EMPTY. THERE WERE NO SECURITY OPERATIVES ANYWHERE . . .

SECTION  
ACCESS LEVEL





... ANYWHERE BUT THE ELEVATORS.

YOU CANNOT PASS. NO ENTRY IS PERMITTED BEYOND THIS POINT.

FAIR ENOUGH!

IF HE'S BARRING MY WAY, I WANT TO SEE WHAT HE'S GUARDING.











RESTRICTED AREA  
NO IDENTIBLOC PERSONNEL  
PAST THIS POINT

MMM! THAT  
MEANS ME!

I'LL HAVE TO  
REMOVE IT!

AUSTIN KNEW HE'D NEVER GET IN  
WITH THE IDENTIBLOC ON HIM. HE  
HAD TO GET RID OF IT

A THERMAL SETTING  
SHOULD DO!







HERE GOES!

SECONDS LATER, WITH THE SMELL OF BURNING FLESH IN HIS NOSTRILS, HE USED A SEALANT PAD FOR THE WOUND. BY THE TIME THE ELEVATOR HAD REACHED THE FIRST LEVEL, THE BLEEDING HAD STOPPED ALTOGETHER.



HE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HE WAS LOOKING FOR UNTIL HE FOUND IT.

GEHENNA . . . NOW  
I UNDERSTAND!

HEY, WHAT AM I DOING HERE? I  
NEVER KNEW THIS WAS PART OF THE  
STASIS PROCEDURE. LOOK, I . . .

THAT'S FENNER — HE'S A MODERATOR. SO THAT'S WHAT  
IT'S ALL ABOUT. ANY AGENT WHO COMES HERE IS  
CAPTURED, THEN CLONED. OBVIOUSLY I HAD TO BE GIVEN  
MEDICAL ATTENTION BECAUSE THEY DON'T WANT TO  
CLONE IMPERFECT SPECIMENS. THERE ARE NO DROIDS  
HERE, ONLY CLONES.





THE NEURO-COTIC WORKED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY —

MOVE HIM!



OH, MY GOODNESS! NOW I KNOW WHAT  
IS GOING TO HAPPEN!





IN THE CONTROL AREA —



AUSTIN . . . HE HAS PENETRATED  
THE SECRET AREA!



UNIT 659/7 HAS BROKEN THE RULES.  
HE IS IN AN UNAUTHORISED AREA!  
TERMINATE HIM!

THE TERMINATORS WERE KNOWN AS CAIN TROOPERS BECAUSE THEY WOULD MURDER THEIR  
OWN BROTHERS.



EXTERMINATE!

SENSOR DETECTS SUBJECT . . .  
PREPARE TO ENGAGE!



NO MORE MR  
NICE GUY!





COME ON! FOLLOW  
THE LEADER!



SO BEGAN ANOTHER LEDEZEMA GAME, NO RULES,  
NO BARRIERS . . . NO MERCY.



THIS IS A WELL-CONTROLLED  
OPERATION. ONLY ONE MAN HAS THAT  
MUCH CONTROL — A PRECEPTOR . . .  
KALYAN!!

AUSTIN RETREATED INTO THE ELEVATOR.

THE ELEVATOR DOORS WOULDN'T OPEN —



HE MUST HAVE BURNT OUT THE LOCKING MECHANISM. LYTTON, GO AND BRING AN IMPULSE SHIELD FROM THE MAINTENANCE STORES. WE'LL GET THROUGH SOMEHOW.



IMBECILES!





AUSTIN HEADED FOR THE "SAFETY" OF THE JUNGLE.

THAT CRAFT SHOULD HAVE A  
FUEL PORT . . . AHHH . . .  
THERE!

MISSILES 1, 2 AND 3 PRIMED  
AND READY . . .

THE PHAS-RIFLE TOOK OVER ALL FUNCTIONS.




NOW!

THE COMPUTER-GUIDED MISSILE STRUCK HOME —









MYERS, TELL THE BAY TECHNICIANS TO GET THE NIMROD READY. IF THOSE MORONS CAN'T FIND ONE MAN, I WILL.

NIMROD WAS KALYAN'S HUNTER-KILLER VESSEL.

HE WAS ONLY JUST IN TIME.



AUSTIN SEARCHED HIS DATA FOR SOME SORT OF FLYING CRAFT, AND WAS DIRECTED TO A HANGAR IN THE JUNGLE.

I WONDER WHAT WE HAVE HERE?



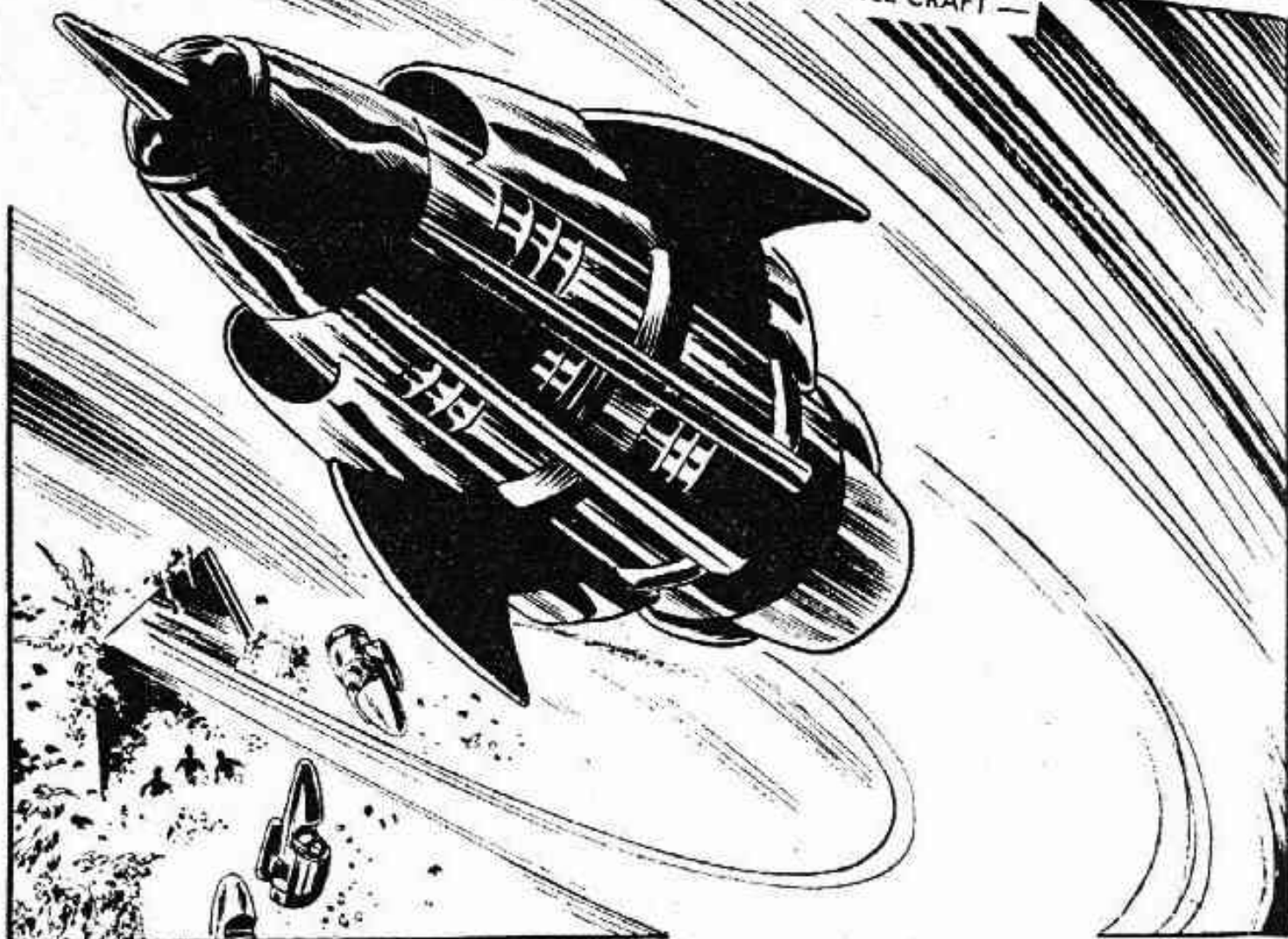
EH? WHAT . . . ?

AUSTIN CLOSED THE DOOR BEHIND HIM —



OKAY, YOU MEN, GET READY.  
WE'RE ALMOST THROUGH . . .

THEY DIDN'T FEEL A THING AS AUSTIN BLASTED CLEAR IN A SHUTTLE CRAFT —





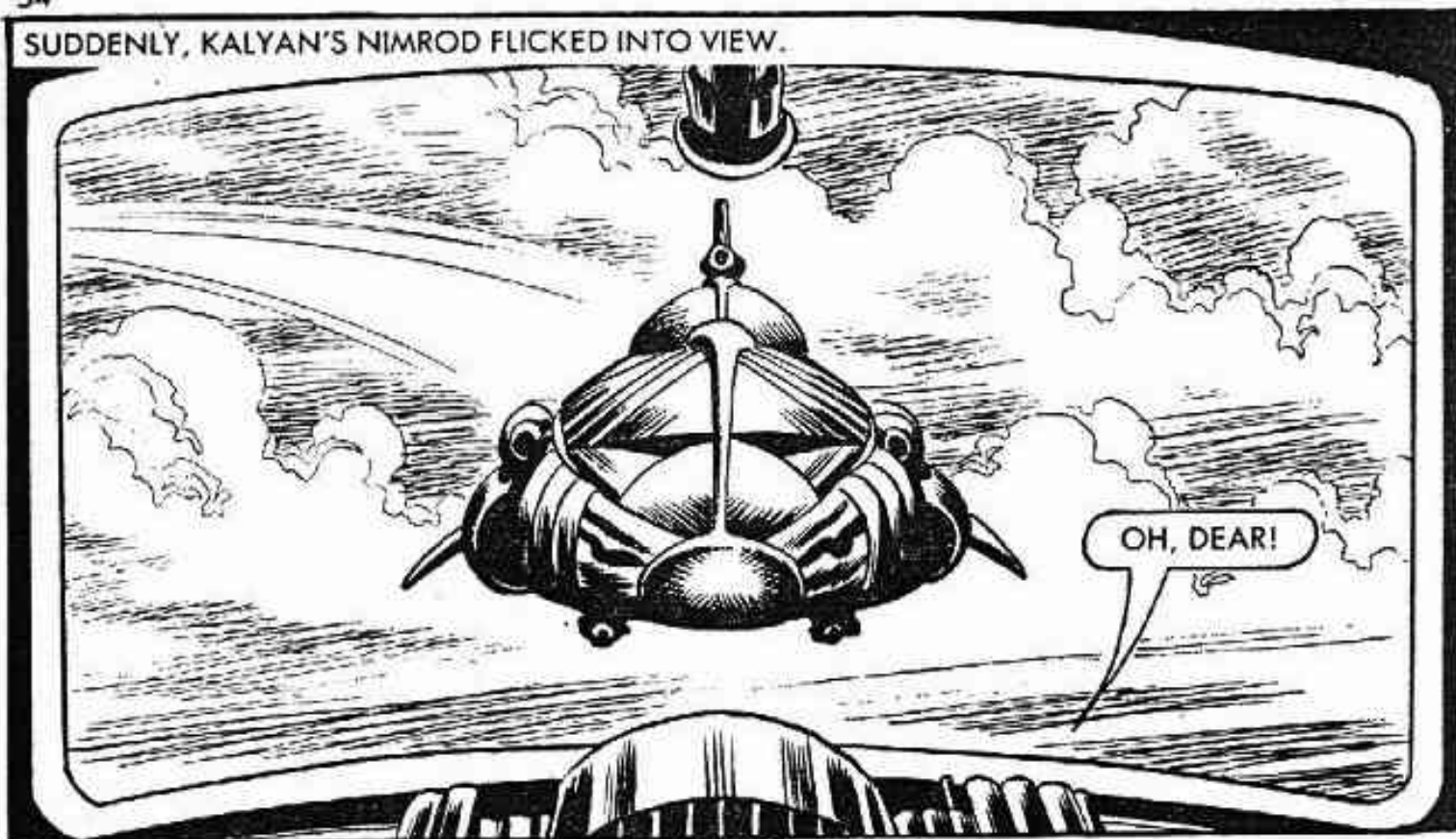
IT WAS ONLY A SALVAGE AND RESCUE CRAFT, BUT IT TRAVELLED FAST, THREADING LIGHTNING THROUGH THE SCORCHED AIR.



IT HAD BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE AUSTIN HAD PILOTED A SHIP, BUT HE FELT GOOD TO BE BACK BEHIND THE CONTROLS AGAIN.



SUDDENLY, KALYAN'S NIMROD FLICKED INTO VIEW.

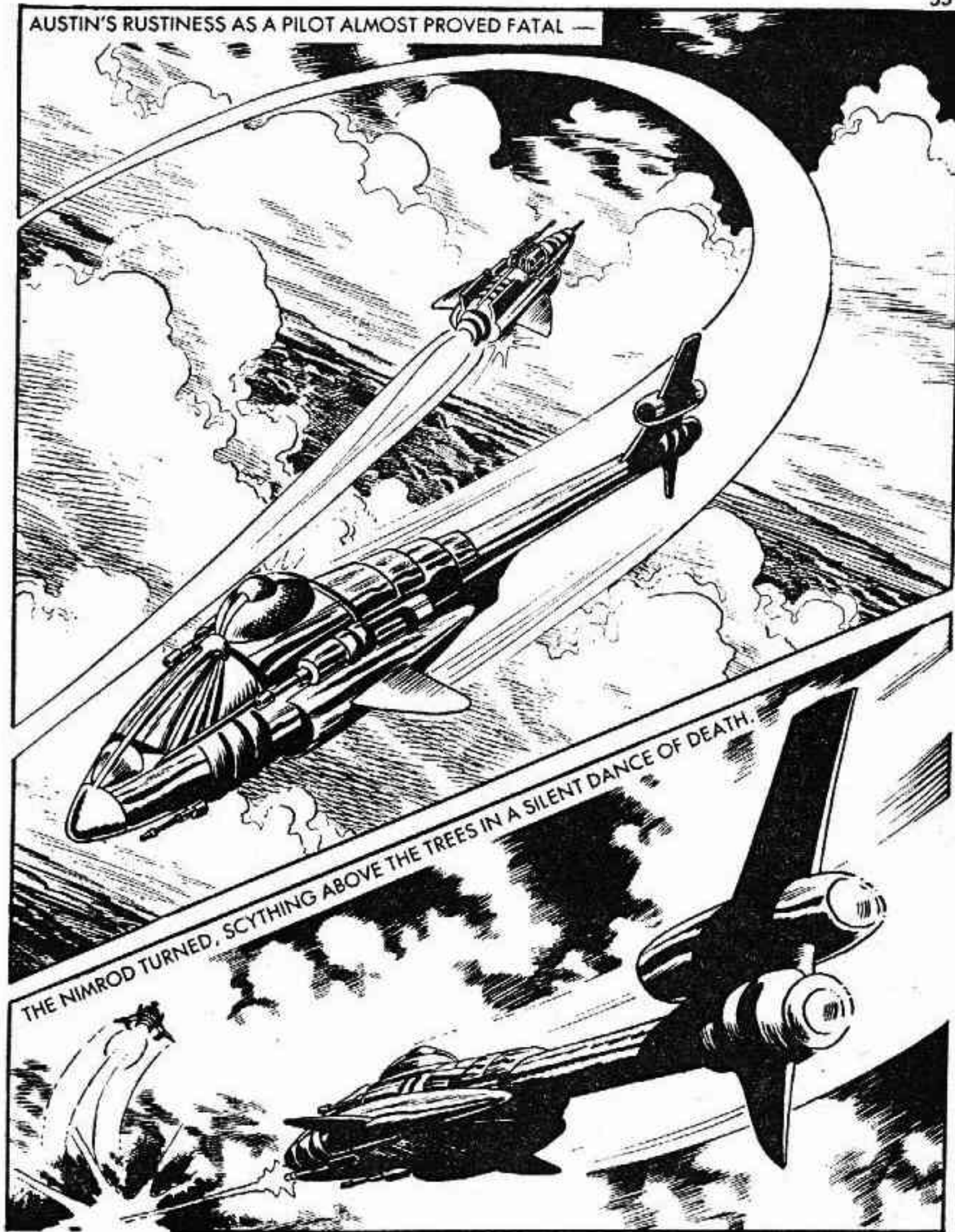


THIS IS IT, AUSTIN.  
THIS IS YOUR DEATH!





AUSTIN'S RUSTINESS AS A PILOT ALMOST PROVED FATAL —



LATERAL CUTTER — MANUAL ORIENTATION TARGET SELECTION:  
CONFIRMED TACHYON LEVEL . . . 7.







SALVAGE CUTTERS? PATHETIC!  
YOU WON'T EVEN GET  
THROUGH THE DEFLECTOR  
SHIELD . . .



YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE  
UP AGAINST, AUSTIN . . .



. . . YOU HAVE NO IDEA.

A CRAZY PLAN FORMED IN AUSTIN'S MIND . . .

UP WE GO . . . TO  
ICON ITSELF.



YES, YES . . . I  
HAVE HIM.





AT THE LAST MOMENT, AUSTIN PULLED THE SHUTTLE AWAY —

TRACTION UNITS . . . ON!

THE NIMROD WAS HAULED TOWARDS ICON AT INCREDIBLE SPEED BY AUSTIN'S ACTIVATED TRACTION UNITS.



KALYAN STARED AT THE FORWARD MONITOR IN TERROR.



NIMROD PLUNGED INTO ICON AS AUSTIN HEADED FOR AN AIRLOCK.



KNOWING THAT ALTHOUGH THE NIMROD WAS CRIPPLED, KALYAN WOULD HAVE SURVIVED, AUSTIN PLANNED FOR THE FINAL SHOWDOWN.



COMMANDER

I'M COMING TO GET YOU,  
KALYAN.

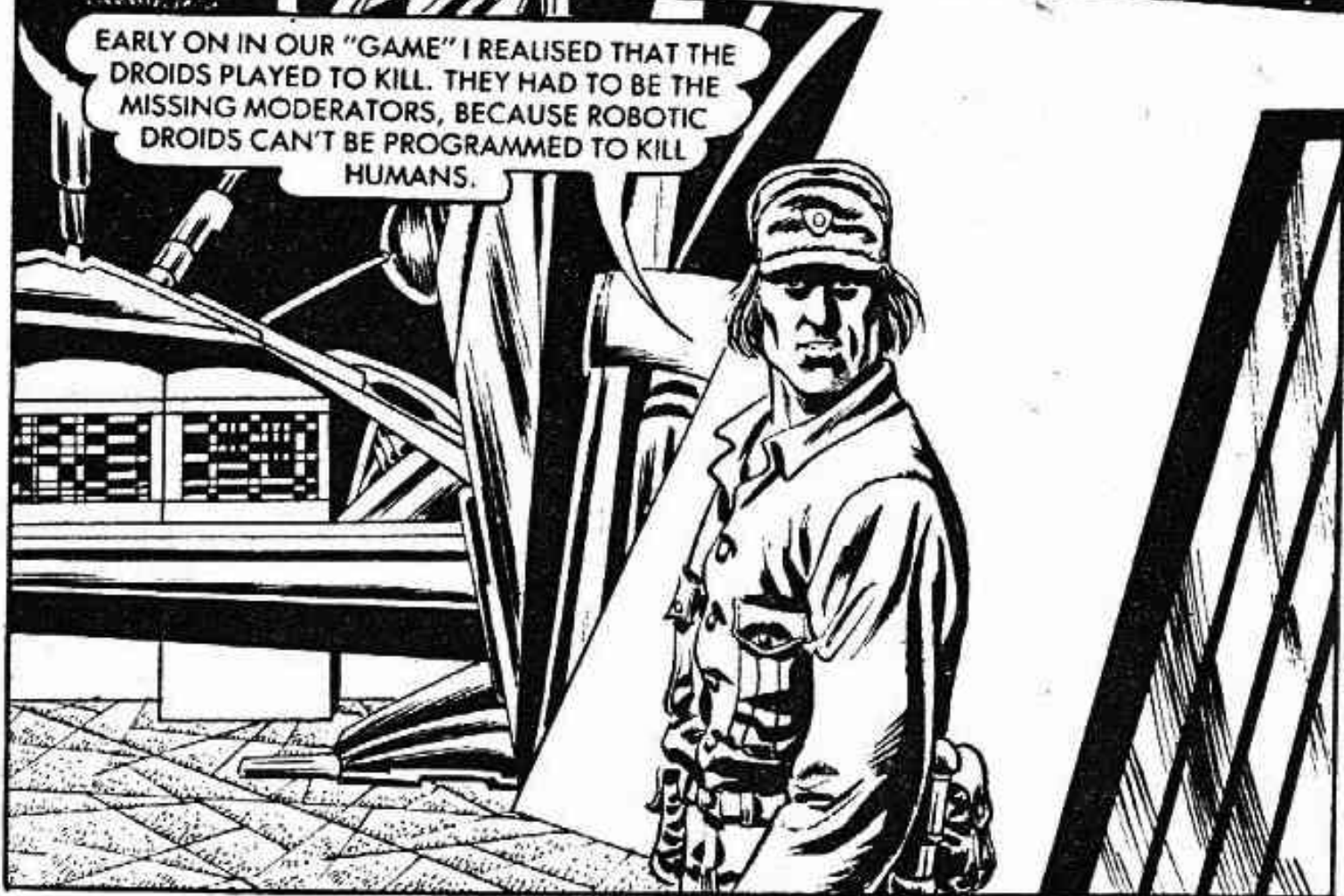
YOU OBVIOUSLY  
EXPECTED ME...

YES... AND NOW  
YOU SHALL DIE!


NOT SO FAST! FIRST I'LL  
TELL YOU A STORY . . .



EARLY ON IN OUR "GAME" I REALISED THAT THE  
DROIDS PLAYED TO KILL. THEY HAD TO BE THE  
MISSING MODERATORS, BECAUSE ROBOTIC  
DROIDS CAN'T BE PROGRAMMED TO KILL  
HUMANS.







I KILLED ELEVEN CLONES, SO ONE IS STILL MISSING. YOU KILLED THE REAL KALYAN. YOU THEN PROGRAMMED HIS GENETIC PATTERN INTO THAT BIOPSY MACHINE. ALL YOU HAD TO DO WAS PROGRAMME IN YOUR OWN DE-REZZ CO-ORDINATES, AND PLAY THE GAME. YOU GOT "KILLED", WERE DE-REZZED TO HERE, AND REMATERIALISED AS KALYAN. AT LEAST, YOU IN KALYAN'S BODY. HOW AM I DOING SO FAR?

SPOT ON! I BEGAN MY CLONING WORK AND WITH AGENTS RE-ASSESSED REGULARLY, IN ANOTHER SIX MONTHS I WOULD HAVE CLONED THEM ALL.

BUT WHY? WHO ARE YOU?

I AM DOWNIE, CLASS OF '90, DUE TO BE RETIRED ON MY FORTIETH BIRTHDAY . . . AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS OF SERVICE THAT'S ALL THE THANKS I GET. THIS LITTLE NOTION CAME TO ME DURING MY FINAL ASSESSMENT — I DISCOVERED KALYAN'S BODY MATTTRICE IN A MED-COMPUTER, THEN KILLED HIM. WITH ALL THE MONITORS CONTROLLED BY ME, I SHALL BE HEAD PRECEPTOR.

NOT IF I KILL YOU.

YOU CAN'T KILL ME — I'LL JUST KEEP DE-REZZING AND REMATERIALISING.



KALYAN BEGAN TO DERESOLUTIONISE —







AUSTIN BLASTED THE EQUIPMENT THAT ALLOWED  
KALYAN TO RESOLUTIONISE.



WITH NO BIOGENETIC INSTRUCTIONS TO REMATERIALISE HIM, THE IMPOSTER FADED TO  
GREY, TO NOTHING, TO OBLIVION.

AUSTIN TO PRECEPTOR NEMBIS . . .  
MISSION COMPLETED. DETAILS ON  
TRANSIT.

KILL SCORE: + 120.



REPORT TO DEPUTY PRECEPTOR FOR  
TEST . . . BSSST!!

SORRY, DIDN'T CATCH THE LAST BIT.  
BESIDES, IT'S POINTLESS — I CHEAT!

AUSTIN TURNED AWAY, ACUTELY AWARE THAT IN A FEW YEARS, HE  
TOO WOULD BE RETIRED — IF HE LIVED THAT LONG.



eldubya/iodinepries

**DON'T FORGET THIS  
MONTH'S *OTHER***



**On sale at your newsagent's *NOW!***



Amongst the many "foreign" spacemen was Soviet cosmonaut Lieutenant Colonel Yuri Vasilyevich Malyshev, 38. He commanded Soyuz T2 on June 5, 1980 on a 3 day 22 hr. 22 min. mission.

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Ю. МАЛЫШЕВ

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